

Pejoratives as Fiction

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Abstract

Fictional terms are terms that have null extensions, and in this regard pejorative terms are a species of fictional terms: although there are Jews, there are no kikes. That pejoratives are fictions is the central consequence of the Moral and Semantic Innocence (MSI) view of Hom and May (2013). There it is shown that for pejoratives, null extensionality is the semantic realization of the moral fact that no one ought to be the target of negative moral evaluation solely in virtue of their group membership. In having null extensions, pejorative terms are much like mythological terms like ‘unicorn horn’ that express concepts with empty extensions, even though it was thought otherwise: people who falsely believed the mythology were misled into thinking that ordinary objects (i.e. whale tusks) were magical objects, and pejorative terms work likewise. For example, the term ‘kike’ is supported by the ideology of anti-Semitism, and speakers who fall prey to its influence (perniciously or not) are misled into thinking that ordinary people (i.e. Jews) are inherently worthy of contempt. In this paper, we explore the consequences of this parallelism, with an eye to criticisms of MSI. In particular, we will re-visit identity expressivist views - those that hold that there are kikes and that they are Jews, and hence deny null extensionality - arguing that this embeds a mistake of fiction for fact. Among the issues to be discussed are the role of fictional truth in understanding pejorative sentences and the relation of the semantics of pejoratives to offensive use of language. We conclude with meta-semantic reflections on the nature of word meanings.

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1 Mythological Reference

In the Middle Ages, people commonly believed in the purificatory and regenerative powers of unicorn horns. It was thought that unicorn horns could heal disease, neutralize poisons, purify water, act as an aphrodisiac, and test for virginity. As they were considered sacred relics by royalty, clergy, and doctors, they were traded for many times their weight in gold. These beliefs and practices surrounding unicorn horns were supported by an entire mythology about unicorns – e.g. that unicorns are magical, pure, powerful, etc. Of course we know now that such beliefs are mythology and hence false. Unicorns, and by extension, unicorn horns, don't actually exist. The real objects that had been called 'unicorn horns' were actually just the tusks of narwhals, a medium sized whale that inhabits the Arctic Ocean.

Given these facts, the meaning of the term 'unicorn horn' requires some untangling. For the purpose of this paper we will adopt a roughly neo-Fregean semantic framework and say that the term 'unicorn horn' determines a concept (or property) which in turn picks out its extension.¹ Though the details are not essential to our point, the compositional concept expressed by 'unicorn horn' might be something like: *the bony, pointed outgrowth from the head of a white, magical horse.*

There is an essential conceptual point and an essential linguistic point to be made here. The conceptual point is that because there are no actual unicorns, this concept has a *null extension*. In other words, nothing satisfies the concept *unicorn horn* because unicorns, and hence their horns, are a figment of mythology. The linguistic point is that competent speakers of English in the Middle Ages *thought* that the term 'unicorn horn' had a non-null extension that was composed of objects like the sacred relics so highly valued in their society. This explains the way those speakers communicated with each other (e.g. bargaining over the prices of such relics) and their resulting actions (e.g. attempting to purify water with them).

The conceptual point and the linguistic point are significantly interrelated. The conceptual point makes clear that such speakers in the Middle Ages were simply mistaken about what was in the world. They mistakenly took the mythology surrounding unicorns as truth. That there were real objects, narwhal tusks, commonly believed to be unicorn horns, and that they were taken as members of the extension of the term 'unicorn horn' is just the instantiation of this mistake. People falsely believed in the mythology surrounding unicorns and were thus misled into the linguistic point; i.e. mistakenly thinking that natural objects accurately fit supernatural description.

¹To clarify, we will not adopt a strict Fregean framework where concepts are objective properties, and instead treat concepts as internal representations or intensions.

2 Mythological Truth

Fictional propositions are propositions expressed by sentences that contain fictional terms. These can be predicative (e.g. ‘unicorn’) or nominative (e.g. ‘Shylock’). The fundamental character of fictional propositions is their inaptness for material truth. They are not the kinds of things that are intended to materially represent.² Fictional propositions subordinate truth for some other purpose, such as the telling of a story. They arise from a context of making as-if, and their purpose is normally to entertain, to moralize, or to educate.

In cases of pure literary fiction (such as novels, film, plays, poetry), this context of making as-if is an open and shared presupposition between speakers and hearers. The inaptness for truth of such propositions is transparent as the common ground between speaker and hearer. This explains why once the performance is complete, the dialogue is concluded. Fictional propositions are not themselves directly entertained afterward (except in the cases of criticism or interpretation). No one wonders after the end of a novel whether a certain character *really* slayed a dragon, or demanded a pound of flesh, or died ten years later. The question of truth simply does not arise in a fictional context, and once that context is complete, the truth of those propositions does not continue to arise.

There are also cases of *impure* fiction where the lack of truth-aptness is less overt. Mythology is the core case of impure fiction. While still not truth-apt, and also arising from a context of making as-if, these features of mythical propositions are not as commonly shared between speakers and hearers as presuppositions. The purpose of mythology is different than literature: myths typically involve the gods and the supernatural in an attempt to offer an explanation of the natural world. Because of this, myths have the power to become embedded into the very fabric of our culture, and thus the question of their truth may persist even after their performance.³

The persistence of myths and their conflict with reality provide for another useful distinction. On the one hand, fictional propositions whether they be literary or mythical are *materially* false.⁴ It is a material fact that there are no such things as Shylock or unicorns. On the other hand, there is a non-material, intuitive dimension that we can label *fictionally true* or *mythologically true*. While not literally true that Shylock is a Jew or that Shylock is not a Catholic, we still want to say that these are intuitively true, or true according to the fictional context created by Shakespeare. These points of fiction are crucial to Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*. In the case of mythology, we want to distinguish the genuine fact that no unicorn has horns (i.e. there are literally no unicorns among the horned objects), from the fictional fact that unicorns do

²Since works of fiction can make reference to non-fictional entities and their characteristics, it is not essential to fictional propositions that they *be* false.

³It is important to note that a piece of pure fiction can be the origin point of a myth. For example, the Bible as a literary work established the ground for the Christian mythology as Biblical propositions seeped into the social structure for their consideration in reality.

⁴There are some rare exceptions. See footnote 2.

have horns. In other words, though materially false, it is mythologically true that unicorns have horns.

The confusion here between material truth and mythological truth is amplified by both the impure nature of the fiction (i.e. that the presupposition of truth-inaptness is not common), and, in this case, that the objectual criteria for material truth has also been met. Recall that in the case of unicorn horns, there were real objects, narwhal tusks, that played the objectual role, and thus the minimal conceptual mark for reference and predication were satisfied though in reality both reference and predication failed.

We can press further along the spectrum of fictional impurity to *propaganda*. Here speakers perpetuate a negative myth toward a particular group of people with the fundamental intent of justifying their negative treatment. As with the previous two forms of fiction, these propositions also lack the aptness for truth. Such propositions fundamentally serve purposes that are at odds with the goal of material truth. Propaganda is the most dangerous of the three since the presupposition of non-truth-aptness is the most covert. With propositions of propaganda it is also important to distinguish material truth from fictional truth. So while it is intuitively or perhaps ideologically true that Jews are kikes, we maintain that such a proposition is materially false. This is a common confusion because of how mythology and ideology are interwoven throughout our culture. And as with the case of 'unicorn horn' there are minimal objectual criteria that are satisfied with 'kike' - just as there actually are narwhal tusks that were commonly believed to be unicorn horns (but are not), there actually are Jews that are commonly believed to be kikes (but are not). Both concepts are surrounded by a normative mythology - one positive and magical, the other negative and anti-semitic. Both terms have null-extensions but *fictionally non-null extensions* given their common usage by speakers under the influence of a corresponding mythology. Because of this common usage, both terms support quasi-felicitious communication even among those who do not adopt the false mythology surrounding the concept. Those who recognize the false mythology may understand what confused speakers are trying to do with their use of such terms; however this linguistic charity cannot overcome the intrinsic material failure of fictional language.

Typically, fictions have characters, and these characters can be acted out. Some types of fiction are designed to have actors, and that they be acted out is the prime intention. Think of plays, for the stage, screen or television. Normally the actors in these kinds of fiction are willing and knowledgeable participants, but this is by no means necessary. Narwhal tusks are the actors that play the role of unicorn horns, yet there is no agency here. Certainly there is none on the part of the narwhal! However, there can be fictions that have agentive actors who nevertheless neither knowingly nor willingly play the role. Racist ideologies are a prime example. Jews do not *consent* to play the role of kikes; to do so would be decidedly abnormal.⁵ Yet they are cast in it, and in this regard are really

⁵With the possible exception of those who may have internalized anti-semitism and accepted a false consciousness.

no different than narwhal tusks. It matters not that Jews could in principle consent but narwhal tusks could not, since nobody is asking the Jews whether they *want* to be kikes. What does matter, however, is that in reality Laurence Olivier is *not* Shylock, narwhal tusks are *not* unicorn horns, and Jews are *not* kikes.

3 Moral and Semantic Innocence

That pejorative words like ‘kike’ have null extensions is central to the Moral and Semantic Innocence (MSI) view in Hom and May (2013). On this view, pejoratives express a semantic component that is represented as *PEJ* that is a second-level concept that takes first-level group concepts (e.g. *being Jewish*, *being Chinese*, *being African-American*, etc.) as inputs and maps them to first-level concepts (e.g. *being a kike*, *being a nigger*, *being a chink*, etc.). These in turn map to False for every argument. They do so precisely because of the negative normative judgment that the PEJ concept expresses - something like: *ought to be the target of negative moral evaluation because of being a member of G*, where *G* is the first order group concept term.⁶ For example, our view semantically analyzes the term ‘kike’ as ‘PEJ(*Jew*)’. Since no one ought to be negatively evaluated on the basis of their group membership, pejorative terms like ‘kike’ have empty extensions. In short, while there are Jews, there are no PEJ(*Jew*)’s; i.e. no Jews who deserve moral approbation on the basis of being Jewish. Now of course there is propaganda (or more accurately an ideology) that holds that Jews are morally culpable on the basis of their religious heritage. This is anti-Semitism, and it is a false ideology on par with the mythology of unicorns.

A central consequence of MSI are the truth-conditions it delivers. Thus, any sentence of the form ‘ α is a kike’ is false even if a paired sentence of the form ‘ α is a Jew’ is true; concomitantly, “There are no kikes” is true, while “There are no Jews” is false. Moreover, it follows that “No Jews are kikes” is true, while both “Some Jews are kikes” and “All Jews are kikes” are false. And in the case of the identity claims:

Jews are Jews
Jews are kikes

it follows that the former is trivially true, but not the latter, which is non-trivial and false. In each these cases, MSI straightforwardly explains our judgements.

⁶We have purposely left loose the notion of negative moral evaluation. If making it more precise is helpful, we are not adverse to thinking of it as contempt, in the sense explicated by Jeshion (2014), following Mason (2003). On this view, contempt is an affective, person directed and focused moral notion based on perceived character defining traits. In the current context, however, nothing hinges on this, so we stick with our more generic characterization.

4 Group Comprehension

In glossing PEJ as the concept *ought to be the target of negative moral evaluation because of being a member of G* , we have illustrated by instantiating the group parameter G as Jews, and of course other possible instantiations come readily to mind in way of characterizing the meanings of other well-known pejorative terms, including racial, religious, ethnic, gender and sexual orientation among other groups. But there is a question here whether there are restrictions on the realization of G in the schema that will indicate the instances of G for which $\text{PEJ}(G)$ is the meaning of a pejorative word. There are a number of alternatives that might be considered in way of an answer:

- 1) There are no restrictions on G ; it can be instantiated by any group whatsoever. This is in effect the claim that group membership is not something that is morally evaluable.
- 2) There is a restriction on G supplied by a theory of *natural* groups. This theory would isolate racial, religious, gender, sexual orientation, etc. as natural groups, and hence as targets of pejoration.
- 3) There is a restriction on G provided by ideologies that are active in socio-cultural contexts. A group could be a value of G only insofar as there is a discriminatory cultural norm that supports it.

Alternative 2) seems to us to have the least to offer, as it very unclear what the natural criteria would be for the categorization of groups. An immediate thought is that they would be biological. Yet, converts to Judaism are just as much targets of pejoration as those born to the faith, and even in cases where conversion is not a live option, for example race, there is good reason for skepticism that there are any biological criteria that individuate races in any coherent way.⁷ While there may be ways to make sense of this option, we leave it aside for others to make the case.

Our view is that a blend of alternatives 1) and 3) is the most promising way to understand how G is instantiated. The contribution of 1) is the idea that group membership is not something that is morally evaluable; it would be as if to say that set-membership is morally evaluable, which is *prima facie* absurd. Thus, *any* group is potentially a value of G .⁸ But by 3) there are grounds for choosing particular groups from this potentiality, as contextually determined by active ideologies. Jews and African-Americans are values of G because of the vitality of anti-semitism and racism, and to the extent that these hateful ideologies die out, “kike” and “nigger” will ossify as pejorative terms; the life of

⁷For example, see Glasgow (2003).

⁸This is so even if the causes of group membership are morally reprehensible acts or attitudes; by 1), mass murderers, pederasts or Nazis could just as much be instantiations of G as Jews or Chinese. But from this it does not follow that there are pejorative terms that target these groups; presumably, this would be an unlikely occurrence, given as there are no underlying ideologies that would generate the fictions that justify the pejoratives, as required by 3). We discuss this in more detail in section 5

an ideology supervenes on the life of a pejorative term.⁹ Thus, the answer to the question at hand - What are the criteria for choices of G such that there will be a pejorative term with the meaning (sense) $PEJ(G)$? - is that it is reserved for groups that for whatever odious reasons have associated with them an unjust, hateful or discriminatory ideology that is culturally ingrained within society. Targeting a group in this way creates an illusion, a fiction; pejoratives are terms of these fictions.

5 *PEJ* and *BAD*

At this point, it is important to bear in mind an important, if perhaps subtle, point. It is this: The *second-level* concept *PEJ*, which we have glossed as *ought to be the target of negative moral evaluation all because of being a G*, must be kept clearly distinct from the *first-level* concept *ought to be target of negative moral evaluation*. For the sake of comparison, we can call this concept *BAD*, and if we like, we can take it as the meaning of the word “bad”. For sake of illustration, we will.

That *PEJ* and *BAD* are distinct concepts is obvious. We have just noted the difference in conceptual level; another evident difference is that *BAD* no doubt has a non-null extension. There are lots of people who ought to be the target of negative moral evaluation, for all sorts of reasons. Some of these reasons are universally shared. Mass murderers, pederasts, rapists are all bad, but there are many borderline cases, some of which are controversial: Are physicians who perform abortions deserving of negative moral evaluation? The justification for the application of *BAD* need not be a matter of social agreement, however. The reasons for negative evaluation may be quite personal and idiosyncratic, and what one person finds objectionable, another may not.

The point here, of course, is that the application conditions for *BAD* are highly context sensitive. Part of that context will be the beliefs of the speaker and her interlocutors. A speaker may say: “Max is bad”, to which the reply might come: “Why”, as a demand for justification for the negative moral evaluation of Max by the speaker. The response will give a reason - “Because he cheats on his taxes” - that can be accepted or rejected: “That’s not a very good reason” we would say, if we disagreed. Because the justification for asserting that someone is bad may vary by utterance, clearly the justification is not part of the meaning of *BAD*, although any assertive utterance containing this concept would standardly be backed by a justification of why the individual in question falls under this concept.

PEJ is different. Someone utters “Max is a kike”. “Why” comes the query; the answer is: “Because he is a Jew”. Again, the response is: “But that is *not* a good reason”. But what is meant by this last utterance is much stronger than in the former case. Here it means that it *could not possibly* be a good reason;

⁹Note that the groupings here need not be natural, and indeed ideologies often go to lengths to establish criteria for group membership that have little or no scientific basis: think of the criteria employed by the Nazis to ferret out Jews.

there is no disagreement to be harbored here. Disputation would only be by anti-semites, that is, those under the grip of a hateful, unjust and hence false ideology.

The difference between these cases points directly to the difference between *PEJ* and *BAD*. For *BAD*, the justification for the application of the concept is a contextual parameter. For *PEJ*, in contrast, the justification is *not* contextual, but is fixed as part of the concept itself; this is the intent of the clause *because of being a G*. What is left to context is the valuation of *G*. As discussed in the previous section, its instantiation reflects the existence of supporting hateful ideologies that are, for whatever odious reasons, culturally ingrained into society. Without this support, there can be no mapping of *PEJ* into a first-level concept. Thus, while no one ought to be the target of negative moral evaluation because of group membership - whatever the cause of that membership might be - for only some groups are there active pejoratives, that is, where *PEJ* is realized for some instantiation of *G*.

Note that we do not mean to preclude that it might be good reason for negative moral evaluation, that is, for falling under *BAD*, that an individual is a member of a certain group, as opposed to just having certain objectionable personal properties or attitudes. In a certain sense, mass murderers form a group, and being a mass murderer justifies negative moral evaluation in virtue of the action one must take in order to become a member of that group. Being a member of that group, however, does not justify being the target of pejoration. *Qua* group, mass murderers are no different than any other group in this regard: Without a supporting ideology, there can be no pejoration. Being a Jew, however, is just as much an unacceptable justification when given contextually for *BAD* as when given non-contextually for *PEJ*. One cannot truthfully assert that Max is bad on the grounds that he is a Jew any more than one can truthfully assert that Max is a kike. Either way, one is saying that Max ought to be the target of negative moral evaluation all because of being a Jew; it matters not for our rejecting this justification that it is merely implied. There is no difference to be had between falling under the (derived) first-level concept *ought to be the target of negative moral evaluation all because of being a Jew* and falling under the concept *ought to be the target of negative moral evaluation*, justified for the reason that *x* is a Jew.

6 Offensiveness and Truth-Conditions

To our knowledge, no proponents for semantic analyses of pejoratives have claimed that offensiveness is a semantic notion, and in our work we have taken care to be clear about this:¹⁰

In distinction from derogation, offensiveness, both giving and taking, is a psychological phenomenon, and can have many sources which

¹⁰Hom and May (2013), 310. See also Hom (2008), 435; Hom (2010), fn., 5; Hom (2012), 397.

one may seek to understand

Offensiveness is a *behavioral* notion that varies with context. What counts as offensive for some people isn't offensive for others. Furthermore a term is not offensive if no offense is taken. The point is made vivid with a personal, childhood story from Kennedy (2003) about the contradictory advice he received from his parents that outlined the options of either taking or refraining from offense in being the target of a slur:

I asked my parents for advice on how best to react to a white person who called me “nigger”. They gave me contradictory advice. My father said that I had standing permission from him to “go to war”. ... My mother on the other hand recommended that I pay no heed to racial taunts, avoid bullies, and let bigots stew in their own poisonous prejudices. She insisted that while “sticks and stones may break your bones, words need never harm you” (xi-xii).

That offensiveness is distinct from the essential character of pejorative terms can be easily observed. Consider the utterance by a man of “You’re beautiful” to a woman walking down the street. That would be offensive even though the utterance contains only words that normally attribute a positive evaluation; it would be just as much an offensive act as a whistled catcall. In fact, as this latter observation shows, offensiveness is not inherently tied to language at all, but rather to behavioral acts, and these need not be linguistic. Gestures, expressions and non-linguistic verbal acts (whistling, screaming, verbal intonation) all may be offensive; in all these cases, offensiveness can be triggered by the same sort of attitudes that trigger the offensive use of pejorative speech acts.

A directly pertinent illustration arises by conceiving of a social-historical context whereby an oppressed group has fully internalized the ideology of their oppressors creating a false consciousness of inferiority. No one is offended by pejorative terms used to refer to this oppressed group because everyone believes the surrounding ideology; in short, everyone believes members of the oppressed group are morally inferior, including those members themselves. Clearly, we can have pejorative terms in this context where the racist ideology has been so completely internalized that no one takes offense. Because there is no offense in this kind of scenario, there is also no *taboo*. Even members of the targeted group believe that they are intrinsically inferior and so no one objects to uses of these words. This possibility suggests that views like Lepore and Anderson (2013) which only address the speech act of slurring are not getting all of the significant linguistic information.

No one is disputing the offensiveness of these words *in use*. Typically when people use sentences containing pejoratives, they will be perceived as offensive and hence they will be doing something offensive; they will have *slurred* their target.¹¹ These obvious points relate to the general psychology of typical language

¹¹A pejorative is a *slur* if it is uttered in the context of a speech act of *slurring*. Hence, not every utterance of a pejorative is a slur; only those that are embedded in a slurring speech act. Offensiveness is inherent in this speech act *qua* a behavioral action of intentional agents.

speakers. Offensiveness is behavioral and depends on the psychological context of the utterance of the pejorative. Because of this, it is explicitly *not* part of meaning. The responsibility of a semantic theory of pejoratives is to deliver the correct truth-conditions for sentences containing these terms. Whatever these truth-conditions may be, the semantic theory itself should have *nothing* to say about offensiveness. Under the MSI view, PEJ is an expression of moral contempt, of negative normative judgment, not offensiveness. It says something negative regardless of how it is taken, and from this flows the truth-conditions of sentences containing pejoratives, as we discussed above.¹²

It is important to bear in mind that since offensiveness is a property of utterances it can accrue to them regardless of how simple or complex they may be. Offensiveness is insensitive to this parameter. The utterance of a single word may be offensive, just as much as the utterance of a whole sentence, and it matters not whether this sentence is itself simple or complex. An utterance of “kike” may be as offensive as an utterance of “Max is a kike”, which itself may cause just as much offense as an utterance of “Max isn’t a kike” or “If Max is a kike, then he is religious”. But these differences in the linguistic context of “kike” are immaterial, since what is offensive is the entire utterance that contains the word. Note that in the relevant sense of utterance, a speaker has made an utterance regardless of whether they have made a use or mention of language. Without circumspection we can run roughshod over this distinction, so that even exposure to mentioned occurrences of pejoratives may cause offense.¹³

In considering this observation about offensiveness, we need to be careful not to make the mistake we alluded to above of confusing offensiveness with an aspect of the meaning of pejoratives. To do so would create the illusion of a projection problem, for it would appear that part of the meaning of a word would necessarily scope out maximally from any linguistic context; as noted, utterances of “Max isn’t a kike” and “If Max is a kike, then he is religious” can be as offensive as an utterance of “Max is a kike”; it would even be possible to scope out of quotation. If this were so, skepticism would perhaps be in order, for this would be a very strange property for a word meaning. But of course no such skepticism is warranted on our view; to repeat: offensiveness is *not* part of the meaning of pejorative words.

¹²To be clear: On our view, it is *incorrect* that “the offensive character of pejoratives is due to an aspect of their meaning”; it is *not* our view that a pejorative is “a word with an offensive meaning” as Sennet and Copp (2015), pp. 1086, 1089 charge. Recognizing this misrepresentation renders otiose much of Sennet and Copp’s discussion of our position. Similarly for the misdescription of our views in Jeshion (2013) and Whiting (2013); see Hom and May (2013). This is not to say, of course, that the meaning of pejoratives is not part of the explanation of offensive uses of these words; obviously they are well-suited to such usage, given what they mean. But in itself, that meaning is not offensive; again, meanings are not the sort of things that are offensive or not.

¹³So some may find that mentioning a pejorative, even in a clear mentioning context such as a philosophical paper or talk where the speaker in no way harbors any racist attitudes, is nevertheless still deemed offensive. However, such speakers are usually content with not counting the deployment of a conventionalized euphemism, for example, “the N-word”, as an offensive utterance of a pejorative.

An important result falls out with this clarification of the nature of offensiveness. Whether one locates pejorative content as truth-conditional, conventional implicature, presupposition or at some other level of semantic analysis, the primary question is what makes a word pejorative; i.e. how to *characterize* that content. None of these views imply offensiveness because offensiveness is purely behavioral. As the thought experiment above suggests, there can be a total lack of offensiveness, and still be pejorative content (wherever you theorize it occurring) - unless offensive is simply stipulated into the semantics.¹⁴ In this regard, there is no difference between MSI and views that purport that there are certain conventions of use (e.g. conventional implicatures) that go with the meanings of pejoratives. These conventions fail to explain degrees of offensiveness because violations of felicity conditions are simply not the kinds of things that offend. This is a confusion between etiquette and offensiveness. Such violations may be funny, awkward, inappropriate, a gaffe, and so forth, but are not the kinds of things that normally cause offense.

At this point, it will be useful to reflect on our use of terms. *Pejorative words* have a certain meaning, which we have characterized as the lexical concept $PEJ(G)$, glossed as “ought to be the target of negative moral evaluation because of being a G ”. For ‘kike’ as the pejorative word, its meaning is then “ought to be the target of negative moral evaluation because of being a Jew”. This is its *pejorative content*, and in virtue of having this meaning pejorative words are expressions of moral contempt, where by contempt we mean negative moral evaluation; see fn. 6. *To derogate* we take to be a particular sort of speech act asserting that an individual or individuals fall(s) under the concept PEJ , for some G . Thus, an assertive utterance of “Max is a kike” is a derogation of Max, and although both “Max isn’t a kike” and “If Max is a kike, then . . .” have pejorative content, they are different types of speech acts. Finally, *offensiveness* is a property of utterances in the broad sense that they can be offensive behavioral acts. This is independent of any sort of speech act, and is not a particular property of pejorative words. It mates well with them, however, given their meaning, and especially when they are used in derogatory speech acts.

7 Negation and The Scope of Denial

By any account of the truth-conditions for sentences containing pejoratives, a simple sentence like “Max is a kike” is true if and only if Max falls under the concept of being a kike. But since no one falls under the concept of being a kike, from these truth-conditions it follows that “Max is a kike” is false. For the same reason it also follows that “Max isn’t a kike” is true, as he falls into the complement of the concept. Of course, there is nothing in these remarks that is not off the shelf semantics. We could have been just as much describing

¹⁴This would be a bad idea not only because it goes against the very nature of the semantic enterprise but also because it makes having the appropriate psychological reaction a condition of understanding the meaning of the word.

the truth-conditions of “Max is a Jew”, although in this case, given the material conditions, Max can fall under the concept of being a Jew. If he does, then accordingly, “Max isn’t a Jew” will be false; if he does not, then it will be true.

The proper assignment of truth-conditions to a sentence and its negation presupposes that the meanings of the constituents are invariant; patently “divorced” has the same meaning in “Max is divorced” and “Max isn’t divorced”. So too does “kike” have the same meaning in “Max is a kike” and “Max isn’t a kike”; accordingly to assert the first is to state that Max falls under the concept and to assert the second is to state that he does not fall under the very same concept.

Negation as described is not the same thing as denial. Notably, when a speaker denies a statement by uttering its negation, it is often accompanied by a focal explanation of why the speaker takes the initial statement to be false. If a speaker utters “Max isn’t divorced”, she may follow up by elaborating that he is still married, or that he has never been married. If “divorced” means roughly *no longer married*, then the denials can be understood as differing in foci; the first denies the *no longer* part, the second the *married* part.

So too with pejoratives. “Kike” is analyzed as $PEJ(Jew)$ and either part can be the focal point. So one response to “Max is a kike” is:

Max isn’t a kike, he’s a chink

while another is:

Max isn’t a kike, he’s a Jew

In the first case the explication indicates that the focus of denial is *Jew*. It was proper to apply a pejorative to Max, the speaker is implying; it is just that the wrong one was selected. The focus in the second case is PEJ ; here the implication is that it is not proper to apply a pejorative to Max, although it is correct that he is a Jew.

A third denial is also possible:

Max isn’t a kike, he’s a Catholic

The focus here is the entire package $PEJ(Jew)$; it is both improper to apply a pejorative to Max and incorrect that he is a Jew. Finally, it is possible not to focus at all, but simply negate the prior statement. In that case, to the extent that the speaker adds an explication, she might say:

That is false. Max isn’t a kike.

In effect, this would be to equate denial with negation.

These examples of focal denial are adapted from Jeshion (2014), who observes that they show that the semantics of pejoratives must have a number of components; she labels these the *group-designating*, *expressive* and *identifying* parts. This descriptive nomenclature is agreeable, and it should be clear how these notions map onto $PEJ(G)$. G indicates the group, PEJ carries the moral load and together they identify G as the bearer of the moral load. Focal denial can target these parts, no differently than it can target the parts of

non-pejorative words. Doing so in the case of pejoratives reflects the structure of their particular lexical semantics.¹⁵

8 Identity Expressivism and Identity

While MSI holds that pejorative terms are fictional, there are views of pejoratives that hold the contrary, that these terms are non-fictional: Not only are there Jews, but there are also kikes. This family of views is bound together by their subscription to the *Identity Thesis*, the idea that pejoratives and their so-called neutral counterparts have the same non-null extension. On one family of views that holds this thesis, what we have called Identity Expressivism (IE), the derogatory significance of pejoratives is offloaded to some other sort of expressive content; for instance to conventional implicature, presupposition, expressivist endorsement of a stereotype, etc. Because of this feature, on IE views there is a commitment to a stronger thesis, *viz.* that there is a level of semantic analysis at which there is no significant difference in content between pejoratives and their counterparts. On IE, this is the truth-conditional level.

As we discussed in Hom and May (2013), there is a very good reason to reject the Identity Thesis. It is that it has the direct consequence that there is no difference between the identities:

Jews are Jews
Jews are kikes.

On the Identity Thesis, both of these sentences are true. Furthermore, for the Identity Expressivist, these sentences are also not distinguished such that the former is trivial, while the latter is not. The obvious correspondence of these examples to Frege's puzzle thus does not follow.

Calling this argument the “strongest *prima facie* argument” for MSI, Sennet and Copp (2015) have responded in defense of IE. Their rejoinder has two parts. The first seeks to besmirch our description of the data, while the second attempts to explain away the appearance of a difference. We can quickly dismiss the latter before turning to the former.

Here is what Sennet and Copp have to say about the difference between the identities:¹⁶

. . . ‘kike’ and ‘Jew’ have the same meaning but . . . conventional felicity conditions governing the use of ‘kike’ preclude a person from

¹⁵Jeshion (2014) thinks that *group-designating*, *expressive* and *identifying* are labels for distinct levels of analysis of pejoratives (as opposed to aspects of a single-level of lexical analysis). While this might be dismissed as a mere disagreement on meta-considerations about theoretical organization, there is more to it than just this. A central reason Jeshion gives for holding that there are levels is that she assumes that the truth-conditions of pejoratives are tied strictly to the group-designating level. The result is that she is committed to the view that “Max is a kike” and “Max is a Jew” are truth-conditionally equivalent, and hence to the truth of “There are kikes” (given that there are Jews). In this regard, Jeshion is an identity expressivist in the sense we critically discuss below, and in Hom and May (2013, 2014).

¹⁶Sennet and Copp (2015), p. 1093.

feliculously asserting ["Jews are kikes"] in certain contexts unless the person has a relevant negative attitude towards Jews. This would be sufficient, we think, to explain why ["Jews are Jews"] seems trivial but ["Jews are kikes"] seems problematic.

Why it would be sufficient is certainly up for grabs, but regardless this cannot be the explanation, at least not of the phenomenon that we are pointing to, as a simple change of example shows:

Kikes are kikes
Jews are kikes.

Both of these are equally well subject to the purported felicity condition, so both should be "problematic", (and perhaps one of them even doubly problematic). Maybe they are, but that is irrelevant, since the standard semantic difference holds for these: "Kikes are kikes" is just as much trivial as "Jews are Jews".

Sennet and Copp's second argument is that we have helped ourselves to too much when we claim that "Jews are kikes" is non-trivial:¹⁷

. . . we have to leave room for cases in which a person is competent with a term without knowing whether it means the same as some other term. In the cases at hand, the debate concerns the right theory of meaning for pejoratives. So it is question begging to assume that ["Jews are kikes"] is not analytic.

That is, just because we have different words, it does not follow that there are different meanings or senses. "Jew" and "kike" *could* be synonyms - how could we know, especially given that there is "a voluminous philosophical literature that disagrees heavily on what words like 'kike' mean". So what right do we have to our claim to the data?

This objection stems from a confusion. From Sennet and Copp's remark we quoted above, for the triggering of the felicity condition, there must be some recognizable difference between "Jew" and "kike" as they appear in the relevant sentences. Accordingly, they must hold, as do we, that there is a formal difference, between a sentence of the form " $a = a$ " and one of the form " $a = b$ ". Now, in the broadly Fregean environment that we are assuming, there is a question of the relation of these forms to the propositions they express. One principle we take for granted - if there is repetition of form, then there is repetition of meaning¹⁸ - but another we do not, that if there is non-repetition of form, then there is non-repetition of meaning. To hold the latter would be to

¹⁷Sennet and Copp (2015), pp. 1092-3. Sennet and Copp characterize the difference in terms of analytic/non-analytic. We do not, but it is not strictly relevant for the present discussion.

¹⁸Sennet and Copp make a comparable assumption, that all repetitions of a form have the same felicity condition. One may object here on the basis of Paderewski considerations. Fair enough, but those objections would be just as much directed against Sennet and Copp as against us. For reasons discussed in Fiengo and May (2006), ch. 4 we do not take these considerations as significant.

rule out synonyms, and so is too strong for natural language.¹⁹ Thus we do not dispute with Sennet and Copp that there can be sentences of the form “ $a = b$ ” in which “ a ” and “ b ” are synonyms. The problem is that we are asked to consider the particular sentences: “Jews are Jews” and “Jews are kikes”, and the question of what is the linguistic competence of speakers regarding these sentences - what is the meaning that speakers know when they know these words? There are two hypotheses on the table: 1) Given what they know, they know that “Jew” and “kike” have the same meaning; 2) Given what they know, they know that “Jew” and “kike” have different meanings.²⁰ There is no uncertainty about what *speakers* know - they know whatever they know - but there is a theoretical dispute about which of the hypotheses is correct. What Sennet and Copp have done is confuse a speaker’s linguistic competence with this dispute about their competence.²¹

So we reiterate our stance. “Jews are kikes” and “Jews are Jews” are distinguished, in terms of meaning, in whatever way we take it that “Hesperus is Hesperus” and “Hesperus is Phosphorus” are distinguished (save that “Jews are kikes” is false).²² On IE views, they are not so distinguished, since in the relevant ways, “Jew” and “kike” are non-distinct. If, as Sennet and Copp say, this may be the strongest argument for MSI, commensurably it is also the strongest argument against IE.

9 Identity Expressivism and Substitutivity

The argument we have given against IE extends. If we accept IE, then we would expect that “Jew” and “kike” should be inter-substitutable in all contexts

¹⁹Note that Frege held both principles for the relation of forms and senses as essential for characterizing logically perfect languages.

²⁰There is no third hypothesis, that speakers don’t know whether they have the same or different meanings. Any such speaker would not know the meaning of “kike” or the meaning of “Jew” on anyone’s account.

²¹Suppose for the moment that Sennet and Copp are right that hypothesis (1) is correct. But then the argument that Sennet and Copp profer can be turned on them. It *could* be that different words are associated with the same felicity conditions, so it *could* be that “Jew” and “kike” have the same felicity condition. So how could we know that “Jews are kikes” and “Jews are Jews” aren’t just the same in this regard? Note that since the felicity conditions are conventionalized, insofar as there is an epistemic task here, it would be just as much linguistic as establishing that “Jew” and “kike” have conventionally different meanings. Accordingly, we take it that the point is moot.

²²We could bring these cases into closer alignment by holding that while “Jew” and “kike” have different senses, they nevertheless determine the same reference. Accordingly, “Jews are kikes” would be true. We doubt, however, that anyone would seriously hold this view. Why? Because on this view, “Jew” and “kike” are associated with distinct ways of thinking about Jews, and it is inescapable that what distinguishes “kike” is that it is associated with the way of thinking of Jews that is characteristic of anti-semites, that is, as the targets of moral contempt. Thus, to have thoughts that contain the sense of “kike” - most fundamentally to think that Jews are kikes - is to think as an anti-semite thinks, that is, to harbor anti-semitic thoughts. But isn’t that just to be an anti-semite? Assuredly we don’t want our semantic theory to imply that anyone who knows the meaning of the word “kike” is an anti-semite, (inclusive of those who posit the theory). Perhaps in the end this is the view that Frege should have held after all.

without affecting truth-conditions. But this is not the case, as we discussed in Hom and May (2013, 2014). Thus,

Max doubts that Jews are kikes

can be true, yet:

Max doubts that Jews are Jews

is false (presuming that Max is rational and competent). Or, in a related case of semantic difference, if we ask:

Why do anti-semites think that Jews are kikes

our answer would be because of ignorance or hatred, because of some moral flaw. But if we ask:

Why do anti-semites think that Jews are Jews,

our answer would be something on the order of because of rationality or analyticity. There is no moral matter at stake here. These facts, we claim, are incompatible with any account in which it is definitional that pejorative content is separated from at-issue truth-conditions, a central tenet of IE accounts.

Sennet and Copp are again unsatisfied. They claim that substitutivity data is inconclusive on the basis of the following examples:

Oprah thinks that MLK is black and smart

Oprah thinks that MLK is black but smart

Am I racist if I think blacks can do physics?

Am I racist if I think even blacks can do physics?

They report that the first sentence “sounds true”, while the second “seems to be false”, and the answer to the first question “seems to be ‘No’”, but to the second the answer is ‘Yes’. Qualifiers to the side, we presume what they mean to say is that these pairs differ truth-conditionally.

Now, for the sake of argument, we will take Sennet and Copp’s judgements at face value. What then is the importance of these cases? The answer is plain: The content contributed by “but” and “even” can be part of propositional content, and can be determinative of truth-conditions. And from this, we can draw one of two conclusions. One is that these cases show that what is conventionally implicated can be part of propositional content. This would imply a substantial departure from the standard view that it is not, and would require a significant revision of how propositional attitudes are evaluated. The alternative would maintain the barrier between conventionally implicated meaning and propositional content; in that case, the examples form an argument that the meanings of “but” and “even” are *not* a result of conventional implicature. *Prima facie* the conclusions are equally plausible; Sennet and Copp naturally prefer the first option, (although they are not forthcoming with the revised view of propositional

attitudes). We favor the second, and have argued to that extent elsewhere; *cf.* Hom (2008).²³

If Sennet and Copp are right about the significance of these examples, (a big if), then to the extent that they critically advance the dialectic it is because they abandon the major premiss of the argument; *viz.* that pejoratives and their correlates do not differ in propositional content, and so in effect abandon the identity thesis.²⁴ It would then follow on their view that pairs like “Max doubts that Jews are kikes” and “Max doubts that Jews are Jews” could differ in truth-value, because only in the former is the conventionally implicated meaning part of truth-conditional content. But this cannot be right, as shown by this pair:

Max doubts that Jews are kikes
Max doubts that kikes are kikes

These display exactly the same difference in truth-value. But this should not be, as both would contain the conventionally implicated pejorative content as part of propositional content, along with the identity; *i.e.* there is no difference in the propositional object of the attitude.

Now Sennet and Copp say something else about the examples under discussion. If the sentences containing “but” and “even” “are offensive despite not containing a word with an offensive meaning,” then the examples with pejoratives “can be offensive without containing a word with an offensive meaning.”²⁵ So, the idea is that in neither case does offensiveness arise from anything about the meaning of words, including the meanings of pejoratives. Oddly, we agree: Pejoratives do not have offensive meanings. As we discussed above, offensiveness is a behavioral notion, given and taken in all sorts of ways, linguistic and not; the notion of offensive *meaning* is a *non sequitur*. We agree that both our examples and Sennet and Copp’s can be *used* by speakers to give offense; that offense is intended may be *conversationally* implicated in certain contexts of use.²⁶ But just because utterances of both types of sentences may have this implicature, it does not follow that it is generated from the same linguistic grounds. In some cases, what is significant may be meanings of particular words, or it may be the interaction of the compositional relations of the meanings of words, or it may be the interaction of the meanings of words with suprasegmental factors, etc. Whatever it may be, one thing is clear. We cannot reason from pairs of unrelated sentences having in common that they may be used offensively by speakers to any particular sort of linguistic commonality. Accordingly, it is irrelevant to the question of the *meaning* of pejoratives whether sentences like those adduced by Sennet and Copp have offensive uses.

²³Sennet and Copp observe in a footnote (fn. 12) that Hom (2008) rejects the conventional implicature account, but dismiss it by simply registering their disagreement.

²⁴To be clear, what we mean by propositional content is whatever falls under the scope of a propositional attitude. To this, “Jew” and “kike” make distinct contributions.

²⁵Sennet and Copp (2015), p. 1089.

²⁶Note that we can (at least try to) cancel the implicature; *cf.* an utterance of “You are a kike, but I don’t mean to offend you by saying that”.

10 Truth and Fictional Truth

Following up on our discussion in section 2, recall that there is a subtlety in how we understand the sentence “All unicorns have horns”. On the one hand, it is true because the null set is a subset of all other sets. But it is also true in another sense, taking “unicorn” to designate a type of fictional character; in this sense, “All unicorns have hands” is false, although it too is materially true. This carries over to sentences like “All kikes are Jews”. For the same reason, it is literally true, and also fictionally true, given that “kike” designates a kind of fictional role. In contrast, “All kikes are Mormons” is true in the first sense, but false in the second. The distinction we are alluding to is that which we drew above between literal and fictional truth.

Sennet and Copp²⁷ argue that, contra the semantics of MSI, “All kikes are Jews” is “intuitively true”, but that “All kikes are Mormons” is “intuitively false”. Quite. But, it is also intuitively true that Shylock is a Jew, and intuitively false that Shylock is a Mormon, and it is intuitively true that unicorns are white, and intuitively false that unicorns are black. What this shows is that the “intuition” here is being placed on the fictional sense of truth, not on the material sense. In the material sense, it is just as much true that unicorns are white or that they are black or watermelons as it is that kikes are Jews or that kikes are Mormons or watermelons.²⁸

To be clear, on our view, “All kikes are Jews” is materially true, and for the same reason, so too is “All kikes are Mormons.” Where they differ is that the former is fictionally true, but the latter is fictionally false, and it is here that we find the locus of Sennet and Copp’s reported intuitions about truth-values. Intuitive truth in this sense is not the same thing as truth. Intuitive truth depends on those who have intuitions, i.e. on agentive speakers, but truth does not so depend. Intuition, especially cultural and social intuition, is guided and influenced by many factors, but one is that it can run roughshod over the distinction of fact and fiction in its application of semantic notions. There may be ideologies, perhaps supported by propaganda, that do their best to make us believe that what is fiction is fact. Ideologies of hatred - racism in general - are prime examples. We can recognize the role played by kikes in the fiction of anti-semitism, and that Jews are typically the unwilling and unwitting actors of this role, but again, from this it does not follow that there are kikes, that kikes are part of the fabric of reality.

11 Best Fit Semantics

On our view, pejorative terms refer to concepts that have null extensions, and we have been contrasting it with views that deny this claim, substituting that they

²⁷Sec. 7.2.

²⁸We could forego the Fregean assumption that universals do not carry existential import for the Aristotelean assumption that they do. Then both “All kikes are Jews” and “All kikes are Mormons” would both be either false or without truth-value.

have non-null extensions, exactly the same extensions as their neutral counterparts. Sennet and Copp²⁹ argue that if we assume a “best-fit” semantics derived from Lewis, we will be compelled to the latter view. We are not so sure.

Here is how Sennet and Copp portray best-fit semantics:

The referent of a term *t* is determined by (a) the term’s use, consisting roughly in people’s dispositions to use the term, and (b) which properties are most natural that ‘best fit’ the term’s use.

This view of reference-fixing leaves quite a bit of latitude, and it raises a number of questions. One issue is who are the people? On Sennet and Copp’s view, use of pejoratives is governed by a conventional felicity condition that limits proper use to those who hold the target group in contempt; only they would be disposed to use such a word. In the case of “kike” it would be only anti-semites who are users of this word; non-anti-semites would not have the disposition to use the word, as they do not hold the appropriately contemptuous attitude. So, it would seem that the reference of “kike” would be by fit to the use of anti-semites, and since they are the only users, they would also be the expert users, and so we would defer to them in fixing the reference of “kike”.

Now we do not dispute that the authors’ of hateful and discriminatory ideologies get to decide who are the targets of pejorative terms embedded within the ideology. But ideologies are fictions, and so these terms are no more referential than any other fictional terms. Just because people at a given time believed a mythology that included unicorn horns as mythological objects, and even though there were actual objects which were an excellent fit for being unicorn horns, and to which they were disposed to refer by use of the term “unicorn horn”, it does not follow that there were unicorn horns. Comparably for “kike”. Just because there is an ideology, and actual objects that fit the descriptive preconditions, and speaker’s under the spell of the ideology that intend to refer to those objects, it does not follow that there are kikes.

So it would seem that clause (a) is not sufficient to fix the reference of pejorative terms; for this presumably we must have coordination with clause (b). Sennet and Copp give the following enumeration of relevant best-fit “natural” properties:³⁰

Well, first we need to know what the salient facts are regarding usage. We presume that anti-semites will agree that ‘All kikes are Jews’ is analytic. Also, we presume that whether one is an anti-semite or not, if one hears someone say ‘There is a kike’ one will take it that the speaker intends to refer to someone he takes to be a Jew. That is, we take it that anti-Semites are disposed to use the term ‘kike’ to direct attention to Jews, and so on, and we take it that non-anti-Semites are disposed to think that anti-Semites are attempting to speak of Jews when they use the term ‘kike’. Evidence of this is the

²⁹Section 6.

³⁰Sennet and Copp (2015), p. 1094.

tendency of non-anti-Semites to complain that people shouldn't use 'kike' to refer to Jews.

Sennet and Copp then claim that “the overall pattern of use makes the set of Jews the best fit for the extension of ‘kike’”.

The problem with Sennet and Copp's argument is that they are confusing the analysis of two distinct notions. One is the analysis of the concept *being called 'kike'*. This is a question of linguistic usage, of whom are the targets of the term in use, and there is no dispute that this concept has a non-null extension which normatively encompasses (but is not limited to) Jews. This concept, however, is distinct from the concept *being a kike*. This is the question of whether there are any such things. The properties that Sennet and Copp cite in the passage quoted are indeterminate with respect to the answer to this question. All of the described properties of use are compatible with *being a kike* having either a null or non-null extension: That Jews are the intended target of utterances of “kike” is not a point of contention; this follows just as much on MSI. But from this it does not follow that Jews *are* kikes, any more than it follows from narwhal tusks being called “unicorn horns” that there are unicorn horns.³¹

12 Metasemantic Reflections

Embedded in the MSI perspective is a certain view about the meanings of words, and to an extent the remarks in the previous section, as well as throughout this paper, presuppose this view. So in closing, we want to reflect on this view, at least in way of making clear our stance.

Most broadly, we subscribe to the view that pejorative words *are* words, and like all other words they have meanings. These meanings are of the same general type as other words of the same linguistic category; hence, their meanings determine that they stand for concepts. Moreover, the meanings of pejorative terms are compositional, containing two functionally related components. This is the lexical structure represented as $PEJ(G)$. This too is not unlike other words of the same linguistic category. “Bachelor” means unmarried man, “divorced” means previously married, etc.

We have given reasons that justify this analysis, particularly its consonance with the observations from focal negation discussed in section 7. What that phenomenon showed was that the component parts of the meanings of pejoratives linguistically *show*, in the sense that we can be aware that each of them can be singled out as a point of denial. It is this awareness of the lexical structure of pejoratives that affords the distinction between the *targets* of pejoration and the *reference* of pejorative terms. These are not the same thing. The question

³¹These remarks apply to all the claims in the quotation, save the first, that “anti-Semites will agree that ‘All kikes are Jews’ is analytic”. Perhaps, but if they do it will be based on Sennet and Copp's view on holding a *true* belief. On our view, it will be based on holding a *false* belief - just because they *agree* that this sentence is analytic, it doesn't follow that it actually is.

of reference applies to $PEJ(G)$, for any instantiation of G ; the question of targeting is the question of what can instantiate G . If G is instantiated as Jews, then they are the target of the word whose semantics is $PEJ(Jew)$, that is, of “kike”. But they are not the reference of this term; rather that is a concept whose *complement* contains the Jews. To conflate targeting and referring commits mistaking the target of a pejorative for its reference; it is to mix-up fact with fiction.

This confusion is perhaps understandable if one fails to recognize the compositional lexical structure of pejoratives. If we are just asking after the reference of an atomic term, then there is nothing on which to hang the critical distinction. Accordingly, it is almost inevitable that the regularities of targeted uses of pejoratives will be confused with its reference, and then of course its reference will be the same as its neutral counterpart: The observed regularities of utterances of “kike” will be the same as that of “Jew”; *ergo* they have the same reference. But of course understanding the confusion does not alleviate it.

Note that we have no particular dispute with the notion that word meanings are fixed by convention, as flaccid as that slogan might be. If we confuse targeting with reference as just described, then whatever the conventions of reference fixing might be, they will be *amoral* conventions. They must be since they will fix the same reference for “kike” and “Jew”.³² In contrast, on MSI reference is fixed by *immoral* conventions. On MSI, the meaning of “kike” is fixed, relative to a negative ideology; it is this fixation of the meaning of $PEJ(G)$ for Jews as the instantiation of G that we have glossed as the concept *ought to be the target of negative moral evaluation because of being a Jew*. But this fixation contravenes an *a priori* moral principle, and so reference-fixing is immoral. It is with this very immorality that the roots of null extensionality lie. On our view, this immorality is in the same league as the the unscientific convention that fixes the reference of “unicorn”, and more generally with the overall unreality of fiction.

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³²So if we take the description of the relevant properties for fixing “kike” that Sennet and Copp give in the quotation in the previous section and uniformly substitute “Jew” they will fix the same reference, *i.e.* to Jews. In neither case are any moral considerations brought to bear in fixing the reference, only dispositions to use. Dispositions themselves are neither moral or not, although an agent’s reasons for having a disposition may be. But these reasons play no role in Sennet and Copp’s account of reference fixing. They are not alone in being semantic amoralists. Virtually any adherent to the identity thesis will be.

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